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In Memoriam

ELIZABETH HOWARD BARTOL

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THE IMAGE PASSING BEFORE US

A SERMON

AFTER THE DECEASE OF ELIZABETH HOWARD BARTOL

BY

C. A. BARTOL

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SERMON.

“An image was before mine eyes.”—JOB iv., 16.

THESE words describe the chief part of human perception, which is not of things outside in broad day, but of objects within, under that dark magic lantern of the brain called memory, imagination, association, affection, many slides and countless pictures with one interior light. While the worship of graven images was forbidden by Moses, and Paul told the men of Athens, Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, they ought not to think the Godhead like anything graven by art and man's device, no law can prevent our beholding and loving other images which no chisel carves or pencil draws. Images of things, plants, flowers, hills, stars, sky and sea, and still more often of dear human faces moulded and painted by a divine hand, yet glowing or with all earthly clay and color gone, dance or solemnly troop before this inward sight, which the latest science teaches is inward always. Indeed the act of vision only seems to take place in the air, really occurring with the passage of forms on the wings of light by a curious course among the convolutions which the skull conceals. How large measure is this image-beholding, with eyes shut or open, of our daily life! Second sight is no miracle, but the ordinary expe-

rience even of a child, the little girl anticipating her own offspring in a wooden doll, the boy dreaming till it becomes a vivid reality what he, too, will do when he is a man.

Let my discourse to-day be but a welcome and hospitality to your images, which should not have a bad name; converse with them being your loftiest exercise and best pursuit, as they are all only portions of that image we are made in, which is the Deity himself, while I cannot doubt that the same image to-day may greet your eyes that passes before my own.

It is the image of a worshipper in the old, long fellowship of our praises and our prayers, one always in its place; the image of a beloved one who credited a living, eternal Power to adore and obey, and inherited this sentiment of homage in a long ancestral line running back through Lowell to Howard and Mayhew in the early history, and to the very foundation, a century and a half ago, of this West Church. It is the image of one ministering,—not of a self-uplifted, but lowly mind. Pride may build a high tower, but humility digs a deep well. The well refreshes, the tower is empty and dry.

It is a living image that I speak of. It will not stay or stop in one posture to be sketched: for any character-artist it never for a moment sat or *posed*; yet, as I try to arrest its motion, it seems to halt and smile, its habit is so strong to stoop and listen and serve; for it is an image of goodness that I present. I see it wait and attend to every request, start and run on every kind errand, wear out street and stairway with untiring step, choose abodes of want rather

than of plenty to visit, seek like the Master what was lost, stand in its own entry whoever had rung the bell to barter or beg, hearken to the last syllable of whatever petition or tale without a look or gesture to end the interview, though all had been said a score of times, and answer *yes* from innate impulse ; or, when obliged by a principle of duty, *no*, but unable to turn any one away, for that would have been the self-denial of which the image I refer to was never conscious in entertaining strangers that were solicitors while the sun went wearily down,—a patience and courtesy so transcending my virtue to imitate I was amazed at, and in vain strove with some decent economy of time and strength to restrain it within bounds. This image I declare not superior to every other, casting into the shadow each image beside of yours or my own; but, in the combined traits, unlike any other, individual and unique. It is of a flowing sympathy, but of a resolute will and self-determination, like the river's bank or rocky bed that holds and guides the stream. A more invincible force of purpose in any other image was never seen; and there is an awe, like a shadow from the throne of God, in living with a conscience in your mate that prompts every deed, utters every word, decides every proceeding, reaches to every trifle and detail and pin's point of behavior, and summons and holds up to the line of rectitude it traces, any deviation from which it cannot endure in you or itself, with all its unmatched personal fondness approaching you steadily, undeceivably, on the moral side, from a conviction of right sufficient for its own conduct, with enough left over of the fathomless fount to

supply a city or a world; what is right in every circumstance or relation being its only aim, main interest, and supreme law. So I must add it is an image of purity, of holiness, which passes before my and your eyes. I am not coloring the photograph I take. I do not overdraw. Simply as I would show you the portraits on my wall or in my portfolio just as they are, so I shall not alter a trait of the image which cannot leave that studio in my breast whereto mortal death is the door; for, while the bodily life lasts, we are perhaps too content to have our friend outside of us. But there is another key than that to the treasure in the tomb; it turns to lock in a vital recollection; and I fear no excess or exaggeration in my draught or my present introduction of the guest that is not confined, being free of the city and to many persons well known. Quality fetches respect. If people love you and honor and revere, there must be something in you, however you may postpone or think poorly of yourself; and it is not my image which I am chanting, more than the atmosphere, sun, spring, fountain, is mine.

So I say my image is ideal, sanctity made truly actual. It endures not a speck of dust without or within. Its instinctive, immaculate cleanness has been my continual delight and rebuke. May it be pleased with my future more than with my past! I believe some are thus born, "sanctified," as the phrase is, "from the mother's womb," incapable of contracting a stain, at once like the gem which no dirt can defile and the asbestos which no fire can consume.

But "love esteems no office mean," and "entire

affection scorneth nicer hands"; and it is an image of industry as much as of any other trait that occupies our thought. How can it be that those fingers are not still at their work? Shall we doubt, other finer hands are furnished in nobler fashion to carry it on? Was that energy so enormous and unfatigued meant for housekeeping alone? Is mending a stocking for child or husband, sewing a shirt or gown for the naked poor, all to occupy it there is? Are the work-basket, scissors, spool of silk or cotton never at rest before, the relics which it is both brought to mind by and left in; and is it appointed for everlasting slumber to a dusty tomb? I will credit no such doom for a faculty so elastic, plain, and persistent, with such virtue to shape either a piece of cloth or mould a pupil's soul. There was one singular native endowment in this particular image. It came in a moment out of, or went in a moment into, sound sleep. However somnolent, at the least sound or slightest touch, it was all itself, wide-awake; and as it talked much with clearly articulate words in what to me, a poor sleeper, were the watches of the night, I question if the marvellously continuous consciousness was ever quite gone. As the brightest light can be produced with a very low electric tension, my bright image incarnate subsisted on a morsel of food. As some engines are driven by lightning, and as there are spirit lamps, so with but an ounce of fuel, licked like alcohol, this flame was lambent and this engine ran. I cannot understand how on so little of gross nutriment such a blaze and speed can be sustained, and such energy put forth. But there are some natures of extraordinary high potency, if I may use

a medical phrase; and this one was congenitally a sparkling and vivacious image, whose age kept unabated and undimmed the liveliness of youth, whose octogenarian laugh was as merry, though never loud, as that of youth, and which showed robust intention in a slender frame. It was intrinsic vigor. I do not think it ever met any person but with a cheerfulness almost gay, a hilarity which was sobriety, like some self-luminous orb that enlivens as it majestically proceeds. The image kept its gloom, gloaming, or gravity for itself. How seriously and invariably it called its own character to account at the bar! How earnestly it pondered the problem of a future lot! How wistfully it looked to its unworthy companion for information on what the sharpest eyes are as unable as the dullest to discern; and how, when the angel came to loosen the silver cord, not a shadow of the life-long solicitude remained. No whirring of wings was heard! Dark angel? Not at all! No such thing! All his terror had been expended long ago, every arrow of his quiver had been shot, his dreadful bow was empty; and he had but to open one gate out and another in. The agony of a birth in 1803 near Washington Gardens, so called, was not repeated in 1883, at a second and greater nativity for one of the oldest citizens, living where born.

There was beside a marked humor and an imitative gift, a dramatic power quite singular in a character so individual and pronounced, although a natural dignity disinclined it to a jest. In former years, it would give impersonations that might have adorned the stage and sang with a sweetness, some will remember, as they must the melody of the speaking

voice. But to keep the standard and the march up to the idea was all it much cared for. Did it respect or esteem itself? If so at all, only latently and unawares. It had no vanity or conceit. Yet it was never abashed before the haughty sons and daughters of men. It took simple humanity for its ground, and sought the lowest forms for its succor and relief, never coveted the society of the great, spoke its mind, if it had to break the silence, with a sincerity like a flash and the stroke, at times, as of a thunderbolt; for of its original candor least of all could this image be bereft, any more than lightning could turn into sluggish mud, or a lancet become a feather duster in a surgeon's hand. By the extraordinary kindness the equally extraordinary truthfulness could never be cancelled or set aside. Benevolence never became an antidote to righteousness in this image's deportment or speech. It had a right to be strict with another, being more severe with itself, taking no relaxation but in change of labor, indulging in no amusement of opera or theatre, going after no great personage or performer, refusing wine, totally abstinent from all pleasure to a fault, with an item flesh and not a cipher of fleshliness, no more of the carnal than a marble statue, yet as warm in affectionate sensibility as the brilliant hearth it sat by at midnight when all the rest of the house had gone to bed. My image was social, but not lonely or lonesome, though loving to be much alone. It was anxious, "careful and troubled," not so much like Martha about many things, but when those dear to it were away, exposed, absent at night. It longed for them to come home, and perhaps dissolved in tears at their

delay. But on their account it suffered, not its own. It was independent, kept its footing, ruled its house, ordered its course, pointed and made for others their paths, and by none that lived, however strong, was ever absorbed. Erect, without external bias or sway, original in its decision or advice, quick to burst out like fulminating silver at what was rough or wrong, yet with what a benignant disposition this temper, which was spotless to leave no smoke or smell in the air, was combined! It was a pure transparency, to foam when shaken, but every minute bubble disappeared from the translucent vessel of humane, pious, and abiding good will.

But the image of Eliphaz not only looked, it also spoke; and mine, yours, every one's, as it passes before the inner eye, speaks in that converse which is more than conversation, and makes us deaf for the time to other voices and insensible of any presence beside. What does it communicate? Clearer than any prophet's oracle or homily from the desk, it says, as I listen: "We know each other better now, and we trust each other more. How slight has been our acquaintance, with all our habitual intercourse! After a constant intimacy, we are more truly together now."

I bow and respond to the wordless speech. It is wonderful how we refrain from offending the blessed, fearful image more than we did the person once; and how much mightier than all its former persuasiveness is its sentence now without sound! Your image and mine says how audibly to the soul: "Let us love each other at last! Mutually dear as we have been, we can be more dear. For this I go. That is the

reason." We say to it: "Oh, forgive us, dear spirit, that seest death as a shadow for thy sunbeam to pass through,—forgive us every injury or neglect"; and, as we cry, instantly it beckons, stretches out a hand, employs that tone the heart's chambers resound with, and back to us responds: "You, too, on your part forgive! Pardon let us give and take." Great and God-like in man or angel is it to condone, to forget an offence, as he that was both man and angel taught and did.

But my image and myself are not on equal terms. We are weighed justly, but in no even scales. I remember, and I mark and own in the image, a devotion to those precious to it on earth or gone before to heaven, a dedication of feeling and will, a practical and intense disinterestedness, second only to its self-offering to its God; and scarce diverse from that which I can but emulate and never matched, holding, as it does, no less of instinct and constitution than of effort and design, and denied to whoever has not the same type of nature as well as a like fair intent.

Bear me witness that I break not the rule which forbids bringing a purely private grief into a public place; for I offer only what I owe to you in not driving out, but receiving, an image that has entered here with us all to-day, not absent from your inward observation and tender regard through the whole of the last week. I have, indeed, followed an example set me, in my personal or conjugal and ministerial character, with a parallel curiously exact Elizabeth Howard, wife of Simeon Howard, and widow of Jonathan Mayhew, the peer of Otis and Adams as a champion of freedom, civil and religious, on these

shores, died April 13, 1773, a hundred and ten years ago, aged forty-three, he living thirty-one years longer, to 1804, the year after was born another Elizabeth Howard, whom as an infant he saw, that babe being the thread by which three ministers in this society are stitched into one. The next Sunday after his wife's decease, Dr. Howard himself preached her funeral discourse, telling his people he hoped to be "more serviceable to them in the work of the ministry, particularly better qualified to sympathize with and to comfort them that are in sorrow, which," he remarks, "I should esteem as one valuable effect of my affliction." Let me emulate my predecessor's faithfulness, and do as I say. As writes Dr. Hedge, whose picture of my subject has well preceded mine:—

"Beneath thy hammer, Lord, I lie.
Thine anvil is the sense profound
Of my own nothingness."

"Do not think, be patient," said that man of genius, John Hunter. Shall I add to his expression and exhort you, Watch, wait, attend with that active passiveness which knows it cannot alter or create, but accepts what comes, and conspires with the wise and loving Source? Not with what we seek, but what seeks us, are we verily concerned; not with one's self and ourselves, but with that which is at once our guest and our host, lord of the feast and invited to the board, serving while he is served. Great kings have called at castles to be ministered unto by their subjects and retainers on their way. Let us be open to give a reception to our more than royal Father in whatever guise, of warning or a largess, at whatever hour of day or night he may arrive, ushered by the

angel of death or the stronger one of life. Be ready for what He will bestow! The best things are not contrived or compassed: they come. I rose from my solitary couch without my wonted greeting, and went to the window long before dawn. I was not going after anything, least of all after the morning-star. But it came to me travelling from afar in its chariot of light, excusing any journey millions of miles into the sky. So with the light of his countenance cometh He who rides on starry rays or windy clouds to bring a real though changeful blessing either way; and, journeying with Him, come His seraphic retinue and escort whose filial mood answers to the parental image. I have heard from a materialist that it is but a bridge of flowers all our faith is equal to building across the huge gulf that sucks our mortality in. But such a bridge of flowers bends not under us. It is firmer than the granite piers and pillars which any logic can plant, and suffices for an army of ghosts, as they softly and silently tread and continually march to and fro.

With all his faults, no desponding or faithless minister did you call so long ago. I have never learned and cannot teach the lesson of despair. May my experience atone and compensate to you for what has vanished from my side, as it has been my constant support and was my long-distant initiation by marriage to your regard. But I feel as one that has lost his recommendation to his employers, and is less sure of the favor granted largely on account of a friend, not at court, but in these courts of the Lord's house. But I will not provoke you to protest your faithfulness to a memory so fixed in my bosom. The live

grass yonder displaces the dead, far away over hillside and meadow; and the gaze of the eye, that deepened into a new intenser blue as my pilgrim departed, attested the fond human affection and assured the everlasting life. Let us purify our love! Heaven admonishes us not to rest in kisses, caresses, and embraces. It sends images instead, how many of them visible and vocal to the mind! Are these visions illusions or hallucinations? No: the sun is the phantom, not the soul! The flesh and what it brings forth are the unsubstantial spectres, not the spirits escaping from the dead, not these figures that return with their "beautiful regards, the wife and mother pitifully fixing tender reproaches insupportable." No, not deceitful these supernatural glimpses which by a law of our being eclipse nature and make us blind to all the things which, as we go forth daily, we walk by; not these voices that make the still atmosphere all one articulate utterance, and fill the air with tender recollections. Space and time, matter and earthly possession, are the vapors, try to grasp them who will. The images are our investments and realities, a property and treasure laid up in heaven. How can the sanctity and goodness miss, and go by default, of these portraits that speak, and never need to be hung or framed, dusted or cleansed? What has become now an image to us had its own images, how clear and eloquent, while it stayed in what we call life. I thought and said the house so long lived in was company; to it every table, chair, or picture a companion. For the ancient abode was to one occupant never a solitude, though all the other members of the family might be absent, and though there

were no caller or guest. It was full of ghosts, blessed with a presence which lapse of years and changes of street or town could never dim or displace; a shadowed glory to whose substance the one that looked and loved has gone; a porch and threshold of a greater building, a stepping-stone, a doorstep to many mansions prepared for us to move in or emigrate to, our tent to be many times lifted and pitched. For is it not absurd to think the spirit is choked by failure of mortal breath. However numerous the actors, pilgrims that pass and leave this lower stage, in the immensity of the universe do they not find accommodation and room? But memory disputes for us with hope. Even by imagination, we can be but partly in heaven as yet. I return to my theme. I greet my image, and show in it what I see, and will not say shall not see any more; for it never was so plainly revealed. That, for which we have but an image now, lived long on little sustenance, and hid much behind the plate that we might not notice how small a part it ate. That was its only secretiveness. With little oil, the lamp burned almost to fourscore; and then, no drop being left, it went out free from violent disease, in painless, oblivious sleep, without struggle or scene, in the most beautiful dying, as the physician declares, she had ever observed. Did the image when incarnate feel displeased with anybody that had erred or done wrong? Its devotion to the imperfect sinful person did not slacken a jot or moment for his fault. It seems to me this is what we mean by the love of God.

For a medium, so called, are supposed certain qualifications, constitutional or acquired; and for a spirit

to pass before our face, for the transit of an image before our eyes, organs of vision and the scientific understanding are not enough. By no sceptic or Sadducee can the conditions of the clear-seeing and finer hearing be fulfilled. Only the spiritual mind can discern spiritual things.

“How pure at heart and sound in head,
With what divine affections bold,
Should be the man whose thought would hold
An hour’s communion with the dead!”

Dead is Tennyson’s word. But it is fellowship with the living, recognition of more life than can be caught, “cribbed, cabined, and confined,” insulated and isolated in the organism of plant, animal, or man. If you do not see or hear it, then you do not. If you do, no negative posture can abolish the affirmative fact or wrestle down the mounting hope.

Your power to seize and detain the flitting image is the measure of your soul. Is it indeed but a glimmer, gleam, or mountain mirage, as fictitious as it is changeful in its shape? I answer, as the wavering light, that makes an image in the water or the cloud, lasts while the mountain crumbles and the sea dries up, so this image for the mind shall outlive nature and time. It is, in the case I have treated, of no tame, average, commonplace quality; rather like a shower and a fire; yet it is laid a solemn offering on a sacred shrine. I deny it to the ground. The elements shall not have it: serve it they shall! Was there aught betwixt you and that of which this image is made? The death, it is brought by and which you are reconciled to, will reconcile you to it; and not to be separated, but only to be united, will you part. More

than a reflection in water or cloud shadow over the hill, it will abide in your spiritual horizon. No flesh can be so solid and no rock so firm.

What did Eliphaz, or the woman of Endor that brought up Samuel for Saul, really see? No more than you or I can. Not for sense is the beautiful, blessed apparition: it is for the mind. Can you hold your beloved ones in your arms, or behold them with the organ of sight? You know you cannot. In many of the epistles of consolation that have flocked to me the last few days, I note especially no persons are to the writers more present than those who have disappeared.

My particular image, a live monogram or photograph of God, is not itself an imaginative thing, however beyond any imagination to clasp. Yet there is no lack of definiteness in itself. It cannot be misconceived, any more than could a gem whose faces and angles may be counted and measured, while its tough texture is not quite analyzed or its flawless worth declared. We are dealing with a piece of nature and a work of spirit, to find fault with which in its features were to complain of the author or artist; short of perfection as must be all that is in process of growth, and unfinished, like a diamond midway with its increments, or a half-unfolded flower or unripened fruit. Therefore, I can fancy endless change and improvement, according to the old promise and prophecy, "from glory to glory," in what I behold and have tried for you to set forth. But, taking it as it is, I am conscious of no wish to change or cause for regret. Therefore, I have requested the choir, this morning, to choose no

melancholy or even plaintive air in their song, but an anthem as cheerful as is our theme, to the Giver of all good. In no personal allusion, so much as in stirring the religious sentiment, is the consolation of our grief. Everything in the world is a reference to something else. Is death alone an end? No, surely it also refers.

APPENDIX.

On Saturday, the 14th of April, 1883, left this mortal state Elizabeth Howard Bartol, aged 79 years, 6 months, and 19 days; and on the following ~~Monday~~ *Tuesday* were funeral services at her house in Chestnut Street and also at the West Church, in which on the succeeding Sunday the discourse herein printed was preached, her husband's letter having been read to the congregation the Sunday previous. He is happy, too, in the publication of the true and tender tribute, at once pathetic speech and word picture, of his friend, Dr. F. H. Hedge.

DR. BARTOL'S LETTER, READ BY REV. DR. CORDNER AT THE WEST CHURCH ON SUNDAY, APRIL 15, 1883.

BOSTON, April 15, 1883.

To my People :

DEAR FRIENDS,—For the first time, when at home and in health, I am not at my post for the Sunday service. My companion has ceased to draw that breath on earth which mortals ignorantly call life. Her spirit passed yesterday toward night. Connected by blood and marriage with three worshipping generations, and with as many ministries, of the West Church, for nearly half a century she has been herself, as much as her husband, your minister, and identified with you all in a constant love and service. It is not enough to call her pure and sincere: she was incorruptible and incapable of untruth. In dying, she had no knowledge of death, but was translated, not perceiving the chariot in which she sat. She slept on her way. Pain stayed back

from her pillow ; and she was all herself, smiling to the last. Her individuality of nature and character suggests immortality, as her being here was nothing but duty.

Your friend and servant,

C. A. BARTOL.

REMARKS AT THE FUNERAL OF MRS. BARTOL BY REV. DR. HEDGE.

With manifest propriety, we bring to this house the mortal remains of our friend whose associations with it were so manifold and so binding,—the church of her ancestors, the church of her early vows, the scene and topic and motive of so large a portion of her active life.

I feel that the word which befits the occasion is not one of sorrow and lamentation, but of grateful remembrance. We are not here to bewail her loss, but to thank the All-giver for what she has been to us, and that she was spared so long to gladden our hearts with the sunshine of her presence, and to strengthen our faith with the lesson of her example.

Here was a life which, within its allotted sphere, may be said to have been complete. Here was a soul without stain or shadow, faith unconquerable, because dependent on no form of words, but fed by the living spirit, charity unwearied, unbounded. A saint in simplicity and meekness, innocent of personal vanity and worldly ambition, she struggled for none of the prizes of life: they came to her unsought. And, best of all prizes, ease and freedom in well-doing. The blessing most to be coveted was hers,—the ability to bless. She lived in the spirit of that saying:—

“Thyself and thy belongings
Are not thine own so proper as to waste
Thyself upon thy virtues, they on thee.
Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
Not light them for themselves.”

So she held her life as a trust for what of good might flow from it to others, casting no thought of self, but only the

claims of her clients, into the scale of her benefactions. She dispensed the blessing of her existence as dutifully, but also as inevitably, as the sun his light. She was one of those with whom right is instinctive, whom it is impossible to imagine wittingly and wilfully guilty of wrong, who need not to set up Duty as a monitor, who ask not "if her eye be on them," but "do her work and know it not."

It was beautiful and wonderful to see, during these latter years, in so exiguous and frail a body so active and keen a spirit. Age had touched no faculty needful for the entertainment of social converse or the conduct of life.

On the verge of fourscore, with great physical weakness, there was nothing that betokened ruin: the decays of the flesh were held in check by the still youthful vigor of the evergreen heart, as, in some ancient abbey, the loyal and luxuriant vine preserves the mouldering wall, nor lets it tumble.

And what an argument and living, walking demonstration of something beyond the power of death was the spectacle of this fulness of life, this immortal vigor, asserting itself in and through that shrunken frame, that child's weight of mortality!

In some cases of decease, it is the body that has to let go the soul it fain would keep, but cannot. Here, it was manifestly the soul which succeeded at last in disencumbering itself of the body. Can we mourn that success? Would we have deferred it until the struggle ended in ghastly ruin, and life became an intolerable burden? Rather, with triumphant joy, we will follow, in our thought, the ascending spirit, while we give to the earth its own.

